NUMB. CXXXV.

The SPECTATOR.

Est brevitate opus, ut currat Sententia—— Hor.

Saturday, Auguſt 4. 1711.

…e ſomewhere read of an eminent Perſon …d in his private Offices of Devotion, to …Thanks to Heaven that he was Born a …: For my own part I look upon it …Bleſſing that I was Born an *Engliſh*-… many other Reaſons, I think my ſelf … my Country, as the *Language* of it is …adapted to a Man that is ſparing of his … an Enemy to Loquacity.

…frequently reflected on my good Fortune …cular, I ſhall communicate to the Pub… Speculations upon the *Engliſh* Tongue, not …ter they will be acceptable to all my curi…

…gliſh delight in Silence more than any o… Nation, if the Remarks which are … by Foreigners are true. Our Diſ… not kept up in Converſation, but falls in… Pauſes and Intervals than in our Neigh… Countries; as it is obſerv'd, that the matter … Writings is thrown much cloſer together, … in a narrower Compaſs than is uſual in the … Foreign Authors: For, to favour our … Taciturnity, when we are obliged to utter …ghts, we do it in the ſhorteſt way we are … give as quick a Birth to our Conceptions …

Humour ſhows it ſelf in ſeveral Remarks that … make upon the *Engliſh* Language. As firſt of … abounding in Monoſyllables, which gives … Opportunity of delivering our Thoughts in … This indeed takes off from the Ele… of our Tongue, but at the ſame time expreſſes … in the readieſt manner, and conſequently … the firſt Deſign of Speech better than the … of Syllables, that makes the Words of o…guages more Tunable and Sonorous. The … of our *Engliſh* Words are commonly like … String Muſick, ſhort and tranſient, that … periſh upon a ſingle touch; thoſe of other … uſe like the Notes of Wind Inſtruments, … and ſwelling, and lengthen'd out into variety …dulation

In the next place we may obſerve, that where the Words are not Monoſyllables, we often make them ſo, as much as lies in our Power, by our Rapidity of Pronunciation; as it generally happens in moſt of our long Words which are deriv'd from the *Latin*, where we contract the length of the Syllables that gives them a grave and ſolemn Air in their own Language, to make them more proper for Diſpatch, and more conformable to the Genius of our Tongue. This we may find in a multitude of Words, as *Liberty*, *Conſpiracy*, *Theatre*, *Orator*, &c.

The ſame natural Averſion to Loquacity has of late Years made a very conſiderable Alteration in our Language, by cloſing in one Syllable the Termination of our Præterperfect Tenſe, as in the Words *drown'd*, *walk'd*, *arriv'd*, for *drowned*, *walked*, *arrived*, which has very much diſfigured the Tongue, and turn'd a tenth part of our ſmootheſt Words into ſo many Cluſters of Conſonants. This is the more remarkable, becauſe the want of Vowels in our Language has been the general Complaint of our politeſt Authors, who nevertheleſs are the Men that have made theſe Retrenchments, and conſequently very much increaſed our former Scarcity.

This Reflection on the Words that end in *ed*, I have heard in Converſation from one of the greateſt Genius's this Age has produced. I think we may add to the foregoing Obſervation, the Change that has happen'd in our Language, by the Abbreviation of ſeveral Words that are terminated in *eth*, by ſubſtituting an *s* in the room of the laſt Syllable, as in *drowns*, *walks*, *arrives*, and innumerable other Words, which in the Pronunciation of our Forefathers were *drowneth*, *walketh*, *arriveth*. This has wonderfully multiplied a Letter which was before too frequent in the *Engliſh* Tongue, and added to that *hiſſing* in our Language, which is taken ſo much notice of by Foreigners; but at the ſame time humours our Taciturnity, and eaſes us of many ſuperfluous Syllables.

I might here obſerve, that the ſame ſingle Letter on many occaſions does the Office of a whole Word, and repreſents the *His* and *Her* of our Forefathers.

There

There is no doubt but the Ear of a Foreigner, which is the best Judge in this Case, would very much disapprove of such Innovations, which indeed we do our selves in some measure, by retaining the old Termination in Writing, and in all the Solemn Offices of our Religion.

As in the Instances I have given we have epitomized many of our particular Words to the Detriment of our Tongue, so on other Occasions we have drawn two Words into one, which has likewise very much untuned our Language, and clogged it with Consonants, as *mayn't*, *can't*, *sha'n't*, *wo'n't*, and the like, for *may not*, *cannot*, *shall not*, *will not*, &c.

It is perhaps this Humour of speaking no more than we needs must, which has so miserably curtailed some of our Words, that in familiar Writings and Conversations they sometimes lose all but their first Syllables, as in *Mob. reb. pos. incog.* and the like; and as all ridiculous Words make their first Entry into a Language by familiar Phrases, I dare not answer for them that they will not in time be looked upon as a part of our Tongue. We see some of our Poets that have been so indiscreet as to imitate *Hudibras*'s Doggrel Expressions in their serious Compositions, by throwing out the signs of our Substantives, which are essential to the *English* Language. Nay this Humour of shortning our Language had once run so far that some of our celebrated Authors, among whom we may reckon Sir *Roger L'Estrange* in particular, began to prune their Words of all superfluous Letters, as they termed them, in order to adjust the Spelling to the Pronunciation, which would have lost all our Etymologies, and have quite destroyed our Tongue.

We may here likewise observe that our Proper Names, when familiarized in *English*, generally dwindle to Monosyllables, whereas in other Modern Languages they receive a softer Turn on this occasion, by the Addition of a new Syllable. *Nick* in *Italian* is *Nicolini*, *Jack* in *French Janot*, and so of the rest.

There is another Particular in our Language which is a great Instance of our Frugality of Words, and that is the suppressing of several Particles, which must be produced in other Tongues to make a Sentence intelligible: This often perplexes the best Writers, when they find the Relatives, *Who*, *which* or *that*, at their Mercy whether it may have Admission or not, and will never be decided till we have something like an Academy, that by the best Authorities and Rules drawn from the Analogy of Languages shall settle all Controversies between Grammar and Idiom.

I have only considered our Language as it shows the Genius and natural Temper of the *English*, which is modest, thoughtful and sincere, and which perhaps may recommend the People, though it has spoiled the Tongue. We might perhaps carry the same Thought into other Languages, and deduce a great part of what is peculiar to them from the Genius of the People that speak them. It is certain the light talkative Humour of the *French* has not a little infected their Tongue, as might be shown by many Instances; as the Genius of the *Italians*, [illegible] is so much addicted to Musick and Ceremony moulded all their Words and Phrases to those ticular Uses. The Statelineſs and Gravity of *Spaniard* shews it self to Perfection in the Sonority of their Language; and the blunt honest mour of the *Germans* sounds better in the Roneſs of the *High Dutch*, than it would in a Tongue.

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